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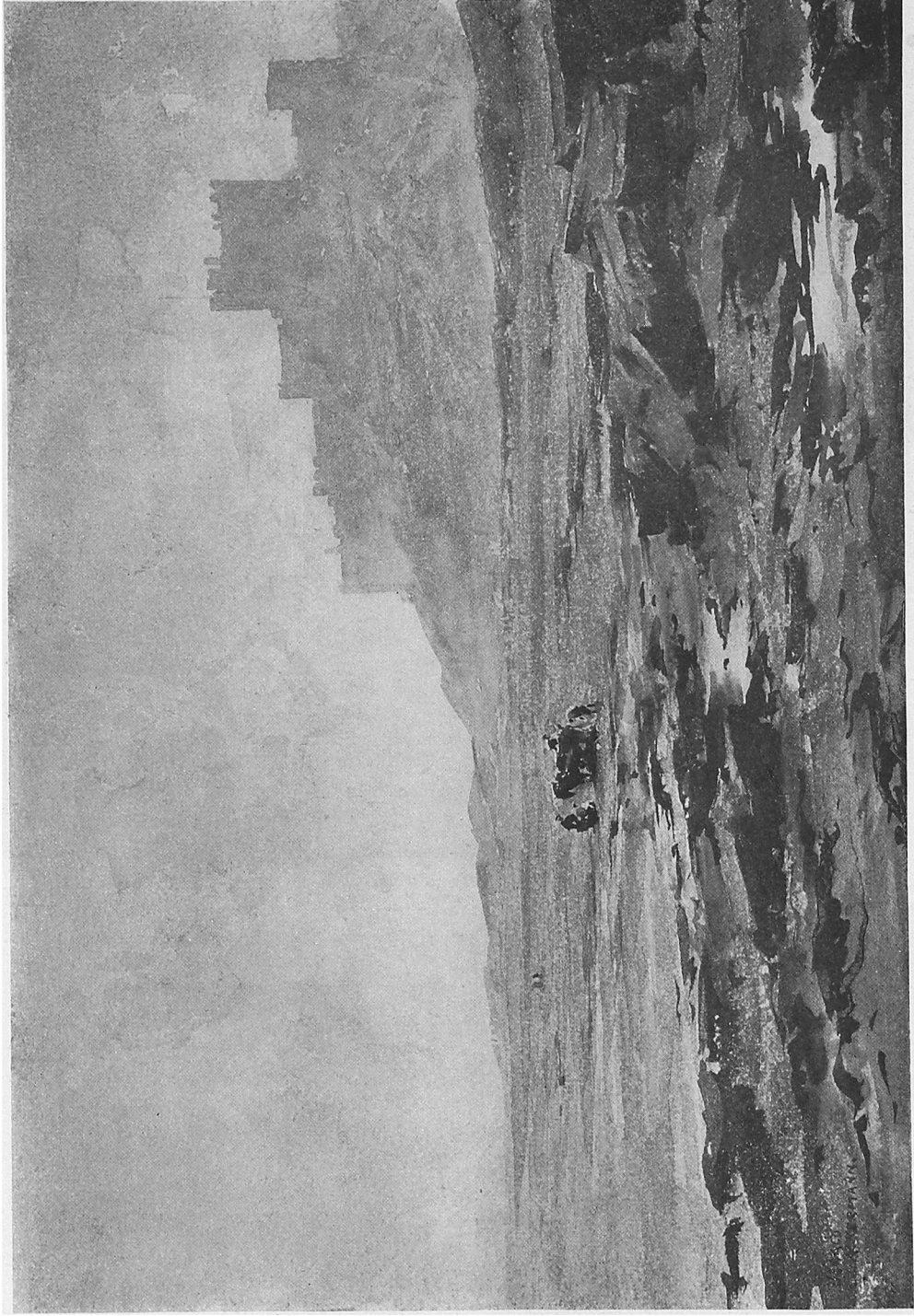
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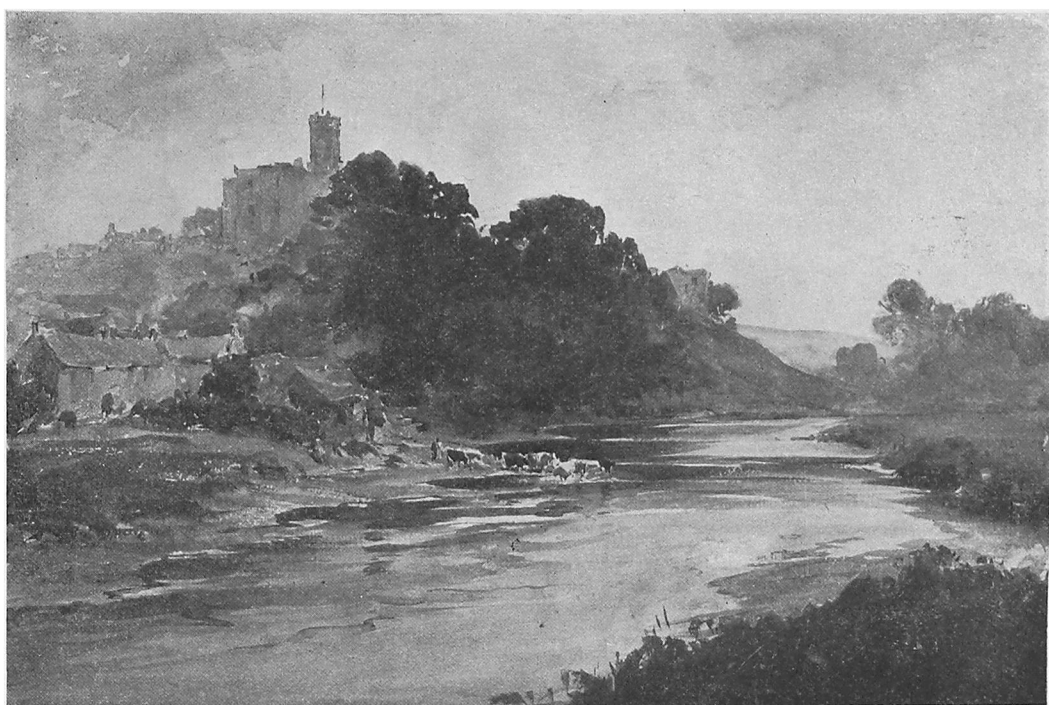
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RAMBOROUGH CASTLE FROM THE COAST
by Gerald Ackermann, R. I.

—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son, Inc.



WARKWORTH CASTLE
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.

—Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son, Inc.

English Water Colors of Gerald Ackerman, R. I.

By EVELYN MARIE STUART

INASMUCH as water color has always enjoyed so much prestige with the English there is something more than appropriate about exhibitions of works in this medium in the galleries of Arthur Ackermann & Son, so famed for their collections of the old prints and engravings which were the beginning of reproductive art in England. The history of this house is so bound up with the development of illustration and of the publication of etchings and engravings which served to preserve for future generations the topography and

manners of England in the late seventeens and early eighteens, that there is something traditional about the activities of one of the last members of the family in seeking to preserve the charm of British scenery through the use of a medium in which the English excel.

"English artists have always taken so kindly to work in water color," says an eminent authority upon the subject, "they have shown such ready mastery of its possibilities, and the beautiful results they have secured have been so warmly and so sincerely



ALNWICK CASTLE FROM THE FIELDS
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.

admired, that it has seemed quite natural to speak of water color painting as the distinctive national art of England. It is undoubtedly a form of expression suited both to the genius of the English artists and the taste of the English public. With no churches or other public buildings to decorate, the arts of the sculptor and the oil painter lie oppressed under the weight of public indifference and apathy. The water color painter, on the other hand, works for

the private apartments of individuals. His modest drawings can only be seen by two or three people at a time; his art, one might say, is essentially an intimate, personal conversational one. So that a society like that of England during the nineteenth century—a society in which the rights of individuals have been very largely insisted upon and the claims of authority and tradition somewhat ignored—would naturally afford more scope for the exercise of an art which does not,

like oil painting, require the scope of a large audience knit together by the ties of thoughts and sympathies held in common."

This history of English art has a brilliant chapter devoted to water color wherein shine great names, as Cozens, Constable, Turner, Cotman, Cox, Hunt, Rosetti and Burne Jones. It had its beginning, however, in the honorable efforts of the topographical draughtsmen at the end of the eighteenth century. Finberg, in his work, "The English Water Color Painters," gives the following analysis of the steps which led to the rise of this art in England and which, even until today, have shaped its course.

During the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century English painters received little encouragement in their native land. The picture buyers of that time even as of ours preferred to spend their money on the works of the Italian, Dutch and French painters, rather than encourage the development of British genius. The only branch of art in which a native artist



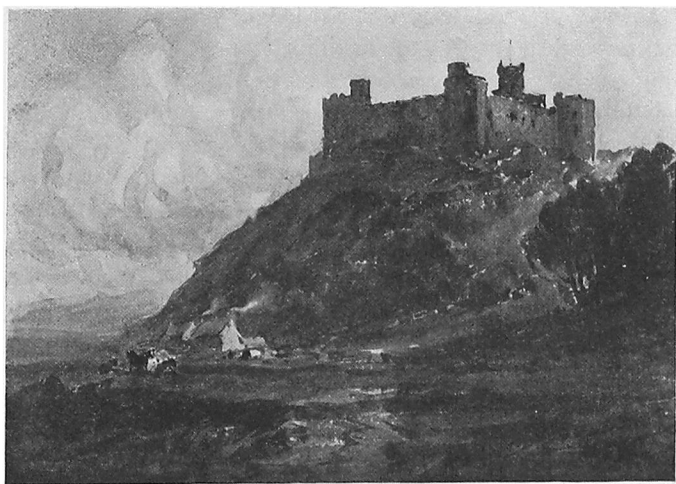
THE VILLAGE CROSS CORFE CASTLE
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.



A FARM NEAR SEAFORD
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.



ARUNDEL CASTLE
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.



HARLECH CASTLE —Courtesy Arthur Ackermann & Son, Inc.
By Gerald Ackermann, R. I.

might find some employment was that of portraiture; and even here the Englishman could only find his opportunity when the supply of foreign artists ran short. The story of Gainsborough's unsold landscapes stacked away in Schomburg House proves that England could produce a great landscape painter long before any considerable body of patrons could be taught to appreciate his work.

There seems to have been a fairly large demand for landscapes, provided they were not of English scenery. History records that an English consul at Venice induced Canaletto to work for him at wholesale prices, and retailed the pictures to British tourists at a considerable profit. In this way multitudes of Canaletto's views of Venice are said to have been sold or sent over to England. The number of Claudes, Poussins, and Salvator Rosas which streamed into the country probably owed more to the attraction of their subject-matter than to their artistic merits. Hence the few English landscape painters who received any encouragement were those who painted such scenes as the tourist could boast familiarity with; and these had to be painted in "the Italian style." So that we find Walpole, writing in 1761, draws attention to the "extraordinary" fact that a country "so profusely beautified with the amenities of nature" as England had produced so few good painters of landscape. "As

with our poets," he says, "warm their imaginations with sunny hills, or sigh after grottos and cooling breezes, our painters draw rocks and precipices and castellated mountains, because Virgil gasped for breath at Naples, and Salvator wandered amidst Alps and Apennines. Our ever verdant lawns, rich vales, fields of haycocks, and hop-grounds are neglected as homely and familiar subjects."

The great task of the eighteenth century was to educate the colored portion of the British public to an interest in the beauties of their own land. "This," says Finberg, "was the indispensable preliminary before a national school of landscape painters could be called into existence. And as we look back now we can see that this task was performed by the topographical draughtsmen and engravers who carried on the work so superbly inaugurated by Hollar in the time of Charles I. From that time we see a constant succession of engravers and draughtsmen riding or tramping into all parts of the kingdom, recording and 'minuting'—to use Walpole's expression—the antiquities and places of interest, sketching the castles, cathedrals, and seats of the nobility and gentry, and thus, without a thought of doing anything of the kind, creating an intellectual atmosphere in which the genius of Turner and Constable could live and thrive."

The draughtsmen and engravers to which our historian refers, were encouraged and directed in no small measure by the first Ackermann and the institution which he established. To him and to them we must therefore accord the achievement of developing the taste of the British public to an appreciation of landscape and a discriminating love of the beauties of their own land, its rivers and hills, its cities and villages, the humblest cottages nestling in its most secluded valleys, the kingly castles crowning its noblest steepes.

To carry on in the spirit of this work

into the higher atmosphere of fine art has been the natural ambition of Gerald Ackermann, directly descended from the founder of the house, and heir to his artistic abilities. His exquisite water colors are notable for their admirable draughtsmanship, their spontaneous feeling, the vigor of the composition and the tremendous perspective which he achieves in small spaces.

He works in pure wash, thereby resigning his muse utterly to the inherent qualities of a medium which is at once soft and elusive, yet luminous transparent and capable of producing the most delicate illusions of light, air, distance and reality. In abandoning all effort to make water color look like oils he returns to the first and best traditions of the medium and places his work in line with all the really great achievements of its kind which the world has ever seen. He is in the forefront of the times also for pure wash is today accredited with the *cognoscente*.

His is a serious art, following traditions that have stood the test of years, even his color being restrained within the range originally advocated by Dayes, Cozens, Cotman and Turner in his earliest period. This old restricted range of color proves vastly more pleasing and successful than the rose and gold and blue and purple of many more ambitiously polychromatic painters. It has a dignity that is delightful and it tends to prevent the medium from degenerating into sweetness or trivial prettiness. It is all the more appropriate too when applied to such themes as the grey old castles of Britain standing on their rock foundations like fortresses of English tradition.

There is something so well in keeping with his story, and the language in which Gerald Ackermann chooses to relate it, that his pictures impress one like folk songs or the legends of a people, for they seem rather to have grown and evolved than to have been consciously made. We feel this rather particularly in his study of Bam-

borough Castle which forms our frontispiece. Here indeed he becomes a poet, for this mighty fortress rises grim and ghost-like in the background just as do the traditions of its times loom up dimly, yet sturdily, in the history of England. This is indeed the backdrop for the spectacle of the present, but it also gives the cue for the character of the play. For this is feudalism, the stern and bitter system under which great private armament and defense were necessary for the maintenance of life. Thrilling tales of daring and romance do these old walls suggest, for Bamborough was a noted stronghold originally selected by Ida, King of Northumberland, as his seat of power. Its site is thought by some to once have been an island, for its rock walls rise perpendicularly and hills of sand have now intervened between it and the North Sea. It was often taken and retaken during the Scottish wars and the wars of the Roses and its story is well interwoven with the history of the land.

Another great historic fortress celebrated by Mr. Ackermann in a song of harmonious tones, is Warwick. Its site was fortified by the daughter of King Alfred. The castle was built by William the Conqueror, and rebuilt by Henry II and was again restored in times less ancient by Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. Our illustration gives an idea of the beauty and dignity of the composition of the original water color but its agreeable greyish greens and wonderful skies are lost.

Harlech Castle is yet another ancient landmark whose massive towers have given our artist an heroic inspiration. This was the border castle in North Wales, by means of which the English held that part of the country in reign. Chepstow, of which Mr. Ackermann has also made a delightful picture, served the same purpose in the control of South Wales. In the Harlech study we have a beautifully managed perspective that gives a stupendous impression of

height and volume even in the small reproduction. The sweep of sky around the hill gives it that feeling of mass with three dimensions, so easily lost when hill or crag is silhouetted against the sky. Little touches of life are afforded in the foreground by the cottage with its smoking chimney and the grazing cattle achieved with little masterly brush strokes perfectly placed. The whole work is brilliant and full of light, realizing to its fullest extent the advantage of water color. An old Welch song, "The Men of Harlech," celebrates the deeds of heroism in days gone by that had this ancient castle as their setting.

Warkworth Castle is yet another interesting motif for a lovely Ackermann water color, featuring the poetic charm of an English country side. Here the distant pile is put a part of the landscape. What a noble beauty pervades this landscape may be appreciated even in black and white, so agreeable is the balance of masses, so dramatic the composition.

Another of our illustrations shows Arundel Castle, faint in the background of a lovely pastoral. A loneliness creeps into this scene that is somehow most appealing. We feel a sympathy arising in us for those who lived in times gone by, shut up in these fortified mansions with all the riches of our later, freer, social life denied them. The tranquillity of the meadow land under soft grey clouds has been exquisitely realized here and the wide luminosity of the skies. His skies indeed are such as only well handled water color can afford, subtle and full of effulgence, achieved with wash and paper only, thereby preserving the full brilliancy of the medium.

A lovely country scene with a cottage in the foreground and the village cross at Carfe complete our illustrations. They give an idea but only that of the sincere, refined and stately beauty of the work of Gerald Ackermann. That he loves England well one would know from his water colors

alone and a distinguished record as an officer in the service of his country during the late war is well in keeping with what we feel in his art work. But he does more than show his affection with his brush, for he makes us feel it too. One looks at his water colors and wonders if land were ever more fair than this and if reality can actually be so charming.

Gerald Ackermann has been highly commended by our great connoisseur, Dr. Gunsaulus, who has even made mention of his works in his addresses. This artist is one of those favorites of fortune that arrive

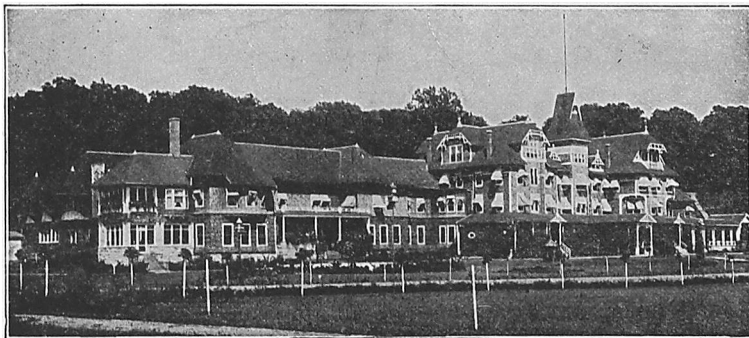
early at artistic honor, for he has captured the Thomas Creswick Royal Academy prize, bestowed for the best work in water color, at the age of nineteen, and has exhibited continuously since at the Academy and in all of the important water color shows. A few years ago he was admitted into the Royal Institute. His work will undoubtedly pass into art history as ranking with the best that the medium and the country have produced and this is saying all that can be said in view of the splendid traditions of English water colors.

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